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THE MEANING OF "The Solid South"

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AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, TUSCALOOSA, MAY 26, 1909, AND REPEATED BY REQUEST AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY, DANVILLE, JUNE 9, 1909

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THE MEANING OF "THE SOLID SOUTH."

In no free government of an intelligent and patriotic people can one find, in this twentieth century of rapid communication and intimate commercial relations, a situation just like that of the people of our Southern States today. Here they stand, politically united against the people of the North and West, just as they did the year the war ended, and yet feeling no animosity towards any. Calmly, consistently, resolutely, for nearly two generations, the Southern people have maintained this remarkable position almost without passion and wholly without physical contest. Other provinces have held out in this way when oppressed and persecuted, but no other known to me has ever maintained such a position so long, while in a state of perfect amity with their fellow citizens of other sections. Surely some cause more fundamental than mere sectionalism, racial prejudice, or political necessity must account for this remarkable phenomenon. It is evident on the face of it that some high principle has supported this devoted people in their position through this long period. What, then, is the meaning of "the Solid South"?

In every essential of national sentiment the United States is a thoroughly united people. In devotion to our characteristic American ideals, liberty of the individual and equality of opportunity for all, in industry and in education, at work and at play, our people are united. Northern capital builds Southern mills and Southern men sell the products to Northern consumers. Northern money aids in founding Southern schools, and Southern boys and girls go to Northern colleges. We visit back and forth in happy friendly relations. Our sons and daughters intermarry, the more freely, apparently, because their grandfathers tried to kill each other. National feeling is certainly as strong in the South as it is in the North, only with the difference that in the South it is usually a little more openly and eloquently expressed. In the war for the liberation of Cuba, Southern boys marched side by side with Northern and Western, proudly wearing the blue and following the flag their fathers fought against, and North Carolina gave the first martyr on the sea and Tennessee on the land. Working together in factory and farm, united in hearts and in homes, we still persist, however, in remaining divided in our political affiliations.

Today, however, many of us sincerely believe that the

time has come when thoughtful men, especially the educated young men who are to lead these people in the future, should carefully consider the grounds of this sectional political division and its meaning to our country. "The Solid South" had its reason for being; it had its mission; it has evidently done good service. What was the reason for its being, the meaning, the mission of "the Solid South"? Whatever this mission was, the South has fulfilled it at the expense of wealth, of blood, and of life; and she still maintains her isolated political position at great sacrifice. One of the greatest of her sacrifices, for example, is loss of national political leadership.

Both great national parties, it seems, have practically agreed that the section of the country which, prior to 1861, furnished nine of the fifteen Presidents and six of the fourteen Vice-presidents, is today disqualified from furnishing any candidates for these highest offices of the nation. The South accepts this verdict for its own, the Democratic party, just as the North does for its party, the Republican. Moreover, this rule is carried out almost to the total exclusion of the statesmen of the South from the active councils of the republic founded by their fathers. Thus, the intellect and the character, representing one-third of the population and one-sixth of the wealth of the country, have no direct part in shaping the political policies or in administering the higher affairs of the nation, to whose interests they are so cordially devoted. By this process the nation loses the active co-operation of a portion of its population more purely American in blood and in love of country than that of any other section, and it loses in part the talents of a race noted for its political ability and wisdom. To the foreigner, we are told, the remarkable fact about this situation is that it persists by the will of the people of the excluded section.

No patriotic men of any party or section can think that such a condition is best for the country as a whole. Certainly it is not best for the young men of the South, like those here today. Has the fact that these young men have grown up amidst such conditions made them blind to that which others wonder at? Has tradition gripped us in its paralyzing arms until we have lost all desire for political influence?

For those shallow thinkers who urge a breaking up of "the Solid South" merely to get into the national game, one can have little sympathy. For those opportunists who, wear-

ied of this isolation, want offices, or for those whose selfish industrial interests move them to seek different political associations, one can have at this time no deep concern. But one must have a profound sympathy and a deep concern for those serious-minded men who are thinking independently about political matters, and who purpose in the future to act independently of mere traditions and party prejudices. There must be such here this morning. To such brave, thoughtful souls, I come as a brother, a Southern man, born and trained, to speak earnestly the truth as I see it.

To understand the present meaning of "the Solid South" we must recall the history of its formation. Though as familiar as the catechism to these older men, I wish, for the sake of my younger hearers, to state, once more, the case of the fathers.

I affirm, in the first place, that the Civil War was not merely the means of uniting the Nation, but, paradoxical as it may seem, the means of determining the exact rights of the States, and thus of establishing the essential Anglo-Saxon principle of the right of local self-government. Devotion to this principle, bred in the blood and bone of Southern people, has determined most of their political actions since the beginning of the government.

From the beginning of history, in fact, the instinct of local self-government characterized the Angles and the Saxons. It took a hundred years of Norman domination to weld their masses south of the Tweed into something like a nation. This instinct for self-government extorted the Magna Charta from King John, tore the Church of England away from the Pope, established the Bill of Rights, and finally wrote the Declaration of Independence for the new American Republic. It then took six years for the thirteen independent colonies, acknowledged free by the mother country, to adjust their local rights and local jealousies sufficiently to form a federation. If it had not been for the fear of attack from without, it is doubtful whether the colonial governments would have united at all. That they came into the union voluntarily and as an experiment was clearly recognized. Virginia expressly claimed the right to go out at will, and, by tacit agreement, the right of secession was accorded also to the other States.

The Constitution made by the fathers was, indeed, as Mr. Gladstone said, the greatest document ever written. But it was not a perfect or a complete document. The makers of

the Constitution were so intent on preserving the autonomy of the States and shaping a nice system of balances in the government, that they left the question of the relations of the States to the Federal government to be discussed for seventy-five years, and settled finally by an appeal to the sword. The conflict between the reserved rights of the independent States, acknowledged by Great Britain in 1783, and the rights and powers of the Federal government formed by them in 1789, was inevitable. In his famous Thanksgiving proclamation of 1863, one of the noblest state papers ever written, Lincoln called this conflict "the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged,"—an absolutely correct description of it. He does not call it "rebellion," but "civil strife," and this it was—an appeal to the sword to settle a fundamental Constitutional question, which had been left open in the written documents. From this point of view we now see clearly that it was also "unavoidable."

Slavery was not the cause of the Civil War, but only its occasion. The whole people were responsible for slavery, not the people of the South alone. The Constitution distinctly recognized slavery, which led the extremist Garrison to characterize it as "a league with death and a covenant with hell," and to declare that "slavery could be abolished only by the dissolution of the Union." Every one of the original thirteen States was a slave State. There was, when the nation was formed, no difference of opinion about the right of slavery. The Constitution put a premium on slaves as property by allowing the State three-fifths of a vote for each adult slave in the apportionment of representation. In the Federal Convention of 1787, New England voted with South Carolina for the prolongation of the slave trade for twenty years, against the earnest opposition of Virginia, which had already, in 1769, prohibited the further importation of negroes. The simple truth is, that men at that time had not yet conceived the full meaning of the right of every man to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." For the people who made this glorious Declaration wholly ignored the rights of 200,000 red men, whom we have continued to this day to dispossess of the soil which belonged to their ancestors for unnumbered generations. That their great-grandsons do not yet fully realize their duty to alien races under the Declaration is shown by their recent treatment of Japanese, Hawaiians, and Filipinos.

Slavery became a national question only when, owing to

unfavorable economic conditions in the North, the institution was transferred to the South, where the cotton gin made slaves increasingly profitable. Of the anti-slavery societies organized before 1830, five-sixths were in the South. The Virginia legislature in 1832 "tied" on a bill for the gradual emancipation of all slaves in that State. It was the abolition movement in the North and the effort of the South to extend slavery to the territories, that made the question a national one. Demagogues on both sides started an agitation which led Southern people to believe that the acts restricting slavery were an invasion of their rights to regulate the affairs of their own States for themselves. It was thus as an attack on the reserved rights of the States, that the slavery question became the occasion of the Civil War. Fundamentally, the principle at issue was the old one of the rights of the States against the rights of the federal government. The great service of the South to the political development of the country before 1861 was this contest to prevent the centralization of power in the federal government. Historically, the demand for a strict interpretation of the Constitution in all matters of local self-government, is the best contribution of the South to the cause of democracy.

From the theory of the rights of the States the South deduced logically the right of secession, a right which had been distinctly claimed on six separate occasions by New England States down to 1844, when the legislature of Massachusetts passed an ordinance declaring that "the annexation of Texas tended to draw the States into a dissolution of the Union," and that Massachusetts "was determined to submit her undelegated power to no body of men on earth." All the States believed also in the right of secession. Davis and Lee were taught States rights and secession at West Point.* The one fact of history, therefore, that Southern scholars should emphasize is, that from the founding of the nation to the Civil War, the South did not contend to break down the Constitution, as some would ignorantly teach, but to maintain the Constitution as she understood it. She did not fight to destroy the government, but to preserve the government as her fathers made it. The South's demand was only that State institutions should not be interfered with, and that the Constitution should be interpreted literally, as understood at the time of its adoption. The South did not contend for human

*Col. R. Bingham, in North American Review, September, 1904—a valuable paper, to which I make my acknowledgments.

slavery without regard to Constitutional rights or love of the government. Her mistake was in making, in her fight for the rights of the States, an issue of the question of keeping human beings in slavery, a wrong that no Constitution could make right.

Having appealed to the sword to maintain the right of secession, the Southern people accepted in good faith the adverse decision of the sword. So was re-established at last that "indestructible union of indestructible States"—this union of independent States "as distinct as the billows and yet as one as the sea."

It was a blessing for the whole world that the secession theory did not prevail. Had it prevailed, America would have been divided into as many wretched little warring republics as South America. While the United States was disunited, European powers, in contempt of the Monroe Doctrine, occupied Mexico, established Maximilian as emperor, and supported him by French bayonets—a beginning of what would have gone on rapidly, if our country had not been reunited. Had the Confederacy succeeded, the little contending republics would have sought to strengthen themselves by European alliances, and as a consequence North America would have been divided up into "spheres of influence," as Africa or China are today, this world's latest and greatest attempt at self-government would have been pointed to by the autocrats of Europe as the bloodiest and saddest failure among men, and Anglo-Saxon free government, now extended to one-third of the world, and spreading rapidly over the remainder, would have been set back for centuries.

Though conquered physically, the South won spiritually, however; another illustration that the body is corruptible, while the spirit is immortal. For the sufferings and sacrifices of the Civil War and of the reconstruction period have resulted in the complete and final solution of the problem of the relation of the States to the federal government. Unfortunately, however, the ballot was conferred upon a horde of negroes, ignorant and unmoral, trained to dependence, incapable of intelligent self-direction. That this was a disastrous mistake is now acknowledged freely in the North. And it was this mistake on the part of the national government which crystalized "the Solid South" and made it, in fact, for a whole generation an imperative necessity. To a unit, the white voters resisted the domination through the ballot of an

ignorant and inferior people. Little by little, by force at first, by careful legislation afterwards, when such became possible, the Southern States succeeded in again placing their governments in competent hands, in framing laws which should eventually wipe out illiteracy, and in further emphasizing the doctrine of the right of the people to local self-government. Under the wise and able leadership of Senator George, of Mississippi, doubtful and sometimes criminal methods of controlling the negro vote have now been replaced by Constitutional laws, based on the reserved power of the States to regulate the franchise. These laws will guarantee peace, security and prosperity to both races.

This settlement of the suffrage question by the State constitutions is now universally recognized, North as well as South, as the final word on the subject. A plan for the reduction of Southern representation, proposed in political platforms for the purpose of capturing the negro vote in certain doubtful States, was killed in a Congress containing a large Republican majority. Thus Congress put its stamp of approval on the rights of the States to control the franchise. Both Ex-President Roosevelt and President Taft have declared that, if these Southern election laws are fairly administered, they should not be interfered with. Finally, the Supreme Court of the United States has sustained the new State constitutions. In consequence, not only has the right of the States to regulate the franchise been determined once and for all, but with it the dread of negro domination has been banished forever from our minds. Moreover, the Constitutional amendments, debarring the illiterate negro from voting, and fixing for him an educational qualification, are of incalculable value to the negro himself, for they have given him his first real hope of having his political rights as a citizen permanently recognized. The South has provided the means of his acquiring an education; for, at the time the new constitutions were adopted, the Southern people doubled and even quadrupled their taxes for the support of duplicate systems of schools for preparing both races for the intelligent exercise of the franchise. Nine-tenths of the money used to educate the negroes comes from the pockets of the white tax payers, who accept the burden as a debt they owe to their country. The generosity of the Southern people to the weaker race is the noblest, the most inspiring feature of the situation.

With the establishment of the rights of the States and

with the passing of the fear of negro domination, the chief incentive, the imperative need of a "Solid South," has thus been removed forever. The work of "the Solid South" has been done, and well done. Now, what of the future?

We shall not go the length of saying that it is wrong for the South to be "solid." We have not heard that any of our great political teachers have told the people of Pennsylvania, of Maine, or of New Hampshire that it is wicked for them to be "solid." Though no Southern State has been disgraced by such corruption as has Pennsylvania, and none has been so consumed by corporation greed as have New Hampshire and Maine. Neither do we believe that "the Solid South" is going to be broken up immediately. But there is no question that the removal of the fundamental reasons for the existence of "the Solid South" clears the way for independent political action by the men of the South. It is a great thing to set men's minds free, and it will be a good thing to have strong party opposition in every Southern State. The solidity of the South, with its unfortunate one-party system, has made her citizens politically inefficient, and has produced much stupid legislation, which has retarded the growth of the country. The long preponderance of one party has made it intolerant, while the other party has been reduced to an organization of office seekers, which never comes to life until a Presidential nomination is to be made, when it sweeps together its ignorant black understrappers and sells them to the highest bidder. The South has thus not only lost all its constructive influence in national affairs, but is in danger of losing all the political ability for which its sons were famed in the past. Moreover, now that the way is open to do so, the men of the South should rejoice in the opportunity to strike for freedom from the political rings and bosses which have selfishly gripped the political life of the section. What we want to see is, not partisan advantage for either of the great national parties, but independent action by all the voters of the South, black as well as white, that men may not be ashamed to vote any ticket they think right, that thus we may have once more in the South free and efficient self-government.

It is not desired to go into a discussion of partisan politics here, but it must now be apparent to everyone that no important issues any longer separate the members of the two great national parties. At least it is true that the same political opinions are held by large numbers in both parties. In

recent years some interesting exchanges of planks and some significant crossings over of men have occurred. The leader of the Democratic party charged the ex-President, for example, with having stolen his platform; and there was much truth in this accusation. The American people would have but one voice if the question were submitted to them, which of these gentlemen was the most effective fighter of the "special interests." Certainly the ex-President is much more nearly akin to the old-fashioned Democrat than to the modern, high tariff, trust building Republican. Now, Republicans of the West have become strong tariff reformers and are fighting their fellow-partisans in the East for the downward revision promised them in the campaign, while Southern Democratic congressman are hanging around the tariff pie-table, trying to pick up a few crumbs of protection. We perceive at last that the tariff is, in fact, "a local issue," as General Hancock said, and that the private "interests" have all these years been getting their spoils under the guise of national politics.

Meanwhile, the party of the South appears to have forgotten or abandoned its time-tried doctrines of the right of local self-government and of tariff for revenue only. After drifting about for ten years, chasing first one ignis fatuus and then another, without any fixed principles of its own, except opposition to the government, it has come at last into the curious position of having substituted for its traditional platform a traditional candidate.

Is it not clear, then, that the times are ripe for a new political alignment in the South? Certainly the hour has struck for the independent man, the man who will think, decide and act for himself. To such independent thinking and acting, not to the support of any political party, I call these young men. From such as these and their fellows all over the South will again arise leaders, who will take over into the national consciousness the best virtues, if not all the doctrines, of the old South. For it is not creeds, but character; not doctrines, but deeds, that count in this world. And first of all those virtues is the virtue of loyalty.

"The Solid South" had its foundation in that spirit of loyalty to the province and the traditions of the province, which has always characterized noble peoples. Loyalty to a cause is the first duty of every human being. It is the first essential of character in the nation, as well as in the man. Loyalty is the life of the patriot, the heart-throb of the hero. When men

say to us Southerners, then, that we are "provincial," let us answer that we are proud of it, for the philosophers all tell us that provincialism is the beginning of patriotism.

The social life of a great nation may, however, become so vast that individuals no longer recognize their social unity. All national virtues and securities are founded on the character of the individual and the home. Neither in the Roman Empire nor in the state of Louis XIV. was anybody at home. For during those epochs centralization had developed until the individual social consciousness, the home consciousness and the provincial consciousness were completely swallowed up. Under such vast social orders the government presents the appearance of an institution that the individual finds relatively strange to himself and to his home. In such a world loyalty passes into the background or tends to disappear altogether. In the province, on the other hand, the individual seeks and finds his own. In the great centralized government he submits to a greater force and disappears.

These considerations lead me to ask, has not our national government become in these days rather a distant and powerful agency for safety, a force that all must fear, rather than an institution to be loved, as our provincial ancestors loved it? The other forces of society, the great combinations of physical power, like our transcontinental railroads; the enormous aggregation of capital, like the trusts; or the tremendous industrial organizations, like the steel and copper companies, now engage our attention and absorb our interest, while we either use them for our gain or flee from them for our safety. Such vast forces excite our curiosity or our wonder, but they arouse no loyalty, produce no national sentiment, but rather the contrary. All ideals are weakened, all loyalties are impaired, by these mechanical, soulless forces. The noise and din of our tremendous industries threaten to drown the voice of patriotism, while the smoke and dust of our vast production cloud the skies and hide the stars by which we must steer the "ship of state."

Such conditions tend not only to destroy loyalty to city, state and nation; they drive many of us to take refuge in partisan organizations, protective associations and trade unions, which would not be necessary if we were not opposed by these gigantic centralized organizations of capital. Manufacturers must organize against their laborers because the laborers are organized against the manufacturers. Such organizations may

be necessary, and are properly conducted sometimes, but the danger is that they are absorbing all the interest and loyalty of many of our fellow-citizens, and so are destroying national consciousness. The breaking of home-ties, the weakening influence of the church, the mad lust for wealth and power, the extravagant display and luxury of the rich, the corruption of our cities, all speak loudly of a loss of loyalty to state and country, to truth and right, that is appalling.

These signs of the times should warn us to cherish this provincialism, which has largely saved the South and its people from these terrible evils. Even if isolation has brought poverty and retarded our development, it were better to remain provincial than that these greater evils should come upon us. Loyalty to home, state, and section tend to preserve the ideals of truth and right upon which the permanence of our institutions depend. For this reason we sincerely believe that the provincial South has still a great service to render the nation in the future. The nation will need our province-bred loyalty to fight other battles, moral as well as physical. Perhaps there should be a new "Solid South." If so, let us consider what may be its meaning and mission.

The provincialism of the South, taken in the sense of individualism, is needed today as a bulwark against increasing centralization. The state, like everything in nature, is an organism, built up of unit cells, organs, and parts, each ministering to each other. Each cell and organ must be in good health and function properly, or the body is not healthy; and, in order to do this, each must be fed and exercised. No one organ can long absorb all the nourishment and do all the work without destroying the whole body. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Centralized government weakens the individual and the home, and tends, by interfering with their functions, to destroy the town and the state. Paternalism may, in time, be as ruinous of man's home institutions as tyranny.

Decided symptoms of this disease appear in our nation today. Through legislation for the "interests," through high, protective tariffs, through a loose system of pensions, et cetera, we are training our people to look to the government for everything. "Be it enacted" has come to be the one cure-all for every defect or disease of the body politic. National politics and legislative interference by the States are the bane

of our municipal governments. The meddling of Washington with State affairs is more hurtful than helpful. Then is there not, indeed, a need of a new Solid South today, a Solid South with a new service to the old cause of the rights of man in local government?

Against such encroachments of the central government upon the local governments, and against these tendencies weakening to the individual, the only protection is a strong social consciousness in the citizen, making him resolutely independent in all local matters. This is precisely what "the Solid South" has stood for these fifty years, and this is what it should continue to stand for.

Provincialism, however, is not sectionalism. Sectionalism is narrow, ignores the rights of other peoples, opposes them, and tends to disloyalty and disunion. Provincialism is the tendency of the people of a province to possess and cherish their own customs, traditions, ideals, beliefs, and aspirations. It does not oppose itself to the same state of mind in others; it is not narrow, jealous, or disloyal to the whole. Let us therefore, as broadminded men avoid sectionalism in the South, but let us cultivate a healthy, a fair provincialism. Let us preserve all our local traditions and customs, our history and our literature, our ideals and beliefs, as a means of training our young people to loyalty. This will not lessen, but rather increase, their national loyalty. The two spirits, the spirit of national unity and that of local independence, should grow together. Love of and pride in the individual community should only increase our love of country.

What, then, is the mission of the independent voter in the South to-day? Shall he, for example, use his vote to break "the Solid South"? The thoughtful Southerner will, I think, not strive to break "the Solid South" for any single reason here suggested. He will not feel justified in doing this merely to put an end to political isolation, stagnation and intolerance, serious though these evils be. He might not see his way clear to do so merely to permit freer political action, give a chance for a second political party, and so secure more progressive State legislation, and prevent corruption, important as all these things are. He would scarcely be willing to do so, merely to get into the national game and give our young men a vent for their political energy, and a share in the nation's thought and progress, desirable as this undoubtedly is. I do not think the sincere patriot would be satisfied with any one,

or perhaps all, of these reasons. The Solid South stood for principles far more important, much deeper than the considerations here named. The earnest man, not an opportunist, will want to see ultimate ends of more vital importance than these before he will break with these old traditions. To all such I commend the historic testimony of the South as a cause fully worthy of their devotion. What better can the sincere Southerner do than continue to help maintain the testimony of the fathers since they landed on this continent, the testimony of the Anglo-Saxon race since the beginning of its history—this testimony for the freedom of the individual to govern himself, his family, his town and his State? Forgetting the wild economic theories of recent years, forgetting secession and slavery, too, let our young men never forget that the original "Solid South" stood for the rights of the State, for the right of self-government everywhere as opposed to centralization and imperialism. Just as our fathers in the Revolution were fighting the battles of Englishmen everywhere, as all Englishmen cordially acknowledge now, so our fathers in the war between the States were fighting the battle of State governments everywhere.

In face of these new propositions for government ownership of railroads from one quarter, and for what is practically government administration of corporations from another quarter; in face of the threatening socialism, presented in one guise by Democrats and in another by Republicans, there is surely need of this ancient testimony of the South for the individual rights of men and a government restricted to the business of governing. This, then, may well be the mission of the new Solid South—to help keep alive and effective the old doctrine upon which all our liberties are founded, the doctrine of the right of men to govern their own home affairs. Our study leads us to conclude, therefore, that, while most of the original reasons for the existence of "the Solid South" have by the logic of events been removed, there is still this fundamental principle to be considered before we join any new political party.

That the intelligence and conservatism of other sections honor the South for her brave testimony in defeat and isolation for the right of local self-government, there is increasingly abundant evidence. Orators at reunions of war veterans, for example, are in the habit of saying that, as a matter of fact, both sides conquered in the war; that while the

North defeated secession and abolished slavery, the South saved the rights of the States and re-established the Constitution. When this is fully recognized, North and South, the last cause for difference will be removed and no possible ground will remain for this unfortunate sectional political division. To make this understood by all the people will require education, and to this task our colleges may well devote themselves.

Young gentlemen of Alabama and the South, I have sought to show you how, through a long historical process, every step of which was characterized by pathetic and yet glorious loyalty to what seemed for forty years a lost national cause, your fathers preserved for us the ideals of free government for which their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers gave their lives. Few chapters of history reveal more clearly than this sad story of the South the glorifying discipline of defeat, and the divine philosophy which commands that the truth must be crucified to draw all men unto it. Failure to win visible success idealized and glorified this cause for your faithful fathers, and inspired them to work for its realization in the far-off future. In the providence of the great God, who overrules all things in this world, you are now called upon to take up the task where your fathers laid it down. You are called to carry on the struggle in order that their glorious ideals of free government may be realized, not merely in our beloved South, but in this whole nation.

An almost inspired statement of this great doctrine of self-government was uttered by the martyred saviour of the union, whose memory all Americans, South as well as North, now love. With a solemn purpose and with profound reverence for the memory of all the dead who died on those terrible plains of Gettysburg, I use as a charge to you, young men of the South, the words he used in his charge to the men of the North:

"It is for us to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead"—and our Southern dead also—"shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

University of Cincinnati, May, 1909.